

Online Research @ Cardiff

This is an Open Access document downloaded from ORCA, Cardiff University's institutional repository: <https://orca.cardiff.ac.uk/id/eprint/123773/>

This is the author's version of a work that was submitted to / accepted for publication.

Citation for final published version:

McDowell-Naylor, Declan ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5300-9127>
2018. Book Review: William E Connolly, Facing the planetary: Entangled humanism and the politics of swarming. Political Studies Review 16 (1) , NP11. 10.1177/1478929917725661 file

Publishers page: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1478929917725661>
<<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1478929917725661>>

Please note:

Changes made as a result of publishing processes such as copy-editing, formatting and page numbers may not be reflected in this version. For the definitive version of this publication, please refer to the published source. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite this paper.

This version is being made available in accordance with publisher policies.

See

<http://orca.cf.ac.uk/policies.html> for usage policies. Copyright and moral rights for publications made available in ORCA are retained by the copyright holders.



Book Review

Facing the Planetary: Entangled Humanism and the Politics of Swarming by William E Connolly. Durham and London: Duke

The focus of *Facing the Planetary* encompasses the facing down of climate-change denial and the overcoming of a 'passive nihilism' that affects even those who accept climate change. The main approach here is to move through a discussion of an exhaustive, and diverse, catalogue of religious, political, philosophical, scientific and anthropological thought, to name a few. Therefore, while a familiar name in political theory, Connolly seems purposeful here in extending the book's audience.

Crucial to the overall argument is the way the earlier chapters continuously establish Capitalism as the root 'destructive geologic force' to be resisted. The theoretical discussion is set in the discussion of chapter 1 of classical political thinkers and the attempts to overcome in them, and others, what Connolly terms 'sociocentrism'. This is the tendency to commit to social explanations that proceed without consulting the 'nonhuman', 'planetary forces'. Of note for readers of political theory is the intention to demystifying ecological processes by calling into discussion planetary processes such as the ocean conveyor systems and their entanglement with capitalism. Readers of Latour may find this symmetrical formulation between nature and capitalism reminiscent of kind that Latour originally criticised in *We Have Never Been Modern* – an auspicious point of comparison.

The book's argument reaches its crux in chapter 5, where Connolly describes the 'politics of swarming'. Here, assemblage thinking is applied to prospective global anti-capitalist movement, galvanised by the 'slow violence' of the Anthropocene. Analogous to honeybees, it is a politics that circulates between sites and scales of action, augmenting and intensifying itself as it goes. Connolly illustrates this concretely: the swarm will move between churches, universities, worksites – working to dramatise the issue, promote non-violence and pressurise multiple institutions on the back of the existing publicity about the Anthropocene.

On his own terms, Connolly calls the politics of swarming improbable yet necessary. It must first overcome passive nihilism and deniers, both of which are in abundance. So, one may share in Connolly's scepticism, although it would also seem to be a polemical device. However, the book's central objective, to face the planetary, is a welcome addition to ranks of thinkers bringing the ecological into the political, joining the call of long-standing advocates like Latour, whose Gaia lectures influence Connolly here. Moreover, the politics of swarming is a potentially innovative heuristic for contemporary activism, for the way it challenges the politics of the past that so often pervades an uncertain future.

Declan McDowell-Naylor

(Royal Holloway, University of London)